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VIEWS

News and Information
for the Communities of the
Bitterroot National Forest
Volume 1
Issue 5



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We welcome your questions,
feedback or ideas! Please
contact Ellen at 375.2609
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with your newsletter input.



A MESSAGE FROM THE FOREST SUPERVISOR

I want to commend Bitterroot National Forest employees for their dedication and commitment to the well being of this forest and its natural resources. Late last year they recognized the urgent need for recovery work in areas of the forest that were severely burned during the fires of 2000 beyond the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation work. They knew an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would have to be written, and in January they set a goal to complete the Burned Area Recovery Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) by September. This was half the time it normally takes to complete an EIS. More than 50 specialists worked diligently through evenings, weekends, and holidays to fulfil this commitment, and by the end of September, the Burned Area Recovery FEIS was completed. The document has been available to the public since early October.

The FEIS provides studies on seven alternatives that consider various levels of fuel reduction, watershed improvements, and reforestation activities in some of the areas that were burned by the fires of 2000. Of the seven alternatives, Alternative F was chosen as the preferred alternative. The findings in the FEIS are the result of years of experience, the best available science, and collaboration with other regulatory agencies.

As the Forest Supervisor, I am responsible for making the final decision. This is a responsibility I do not take lightly. I am confident in the combined knowledge, years of experience, and professionalism of the employees who developed and wrote the Burned Area Recovery FEIS. It has made my task easier in making an informed decision about what is best for our National Forest lands for the long-term.


Rodd Richardson
Forest Supervisor

The total acres burned in 2000 was three times more than the total acres burned on the forest in the 10 year period of 1990-1999.

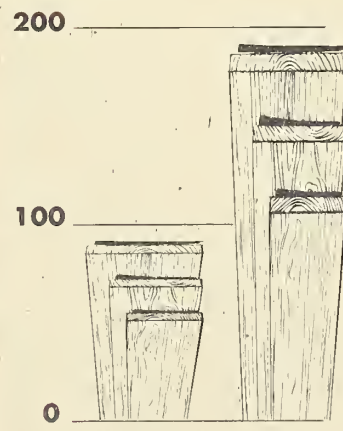
In that 10 year period, 83 mmbf of timber was sold. Alternative F, the preferred alternative proposes to reduce fuels on about 46,000 acres through commercial timber sales, stewardship contracts, and service contracts that equate to 181 mmbf. Comparing both situations the amount harvested is relative to the amount of total acres burned as shown in the chart right.

It makes good economical sense to offset the cost of reducing fuels through salvage harvesting (salvage sales, service contracts, or firewood cutting) as projected in the preferred Alternative F at a cost of \$6/acre. Alternative B-\$82/acre; Alternative D-\$69/acre; Alternative E-\$46/acre; Alternative G proposes non-commercial fuel reduction work-\$804/acre; Alternative A&C propose no fuel reduction-\$0/acre.

Acres Burned
300,000
200,000
100,000



mmbf Sold
200
100
0



Can you identify where private land ends and National Forest land begins on our "cover" photo?
See page 4

The FEIS provides studies on seven alternatives that consider various levels of fuel reduction, watershed improvements, and reforestation activities in some of the areas that were burned by the fires of 2000.

The Burned Area Recovery Final Environmental Impact Statement, FEIS Summary, map package in hard copy or on compact disk is available at all Bitterroot National Forest offices. The full FEIS, Summary, map package, and other related information is also available on the Bitterroot National Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/recovery/recovery_index.html

In March of this year, two small demonstration areas of less than three acres each were set up to demonstrate what the forest would look like after a fuel reduction project is completed in an area where the fires of 2000 burned at a high severity. The location of the demonstration sites are in the Cow Creek drainage slightly northwest of the town of Hamilton, MT and the Waugh Gulch drainage about three miles southwest of Sula, MT.

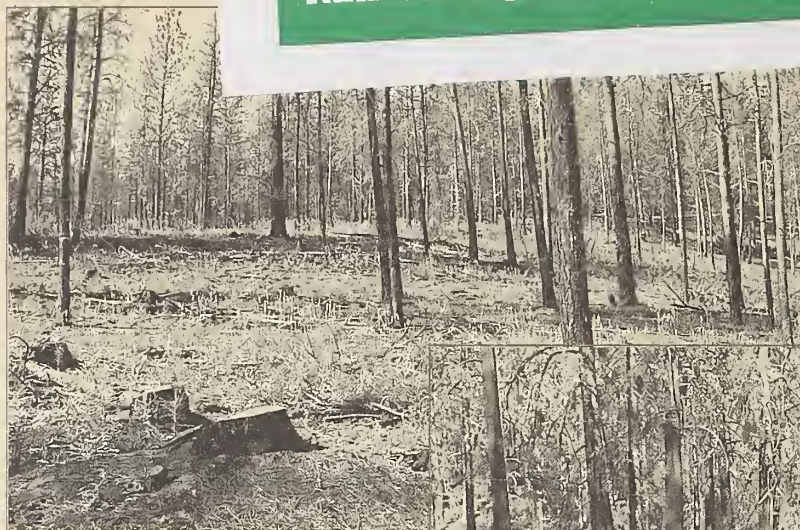
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Treatment Area

FUEL RED

ATION AREA



Right: Untreated area adjacent to the demonstration site.

August 2001.



...e of the treatment area in the Cow Creek drainage where burned timber has been harvested to reduce future fuel loads. August 2001.

FUEL REDUCTION—WAUGH GULCH DEMONSTRATION AREA

Right: The Waugh Gulch treatment area is located on the furthest ridge visible.

Below: The Waugh Gulch Treatment area August 2001.

NOTE: harvesting.



Right: In the untreated area adjacent to Waugh Gulch, fire has killed almost all the trees. Over the coming years these will become ground fuels as they weaken and fall. The potential heavy fuel loading will pose a high fire risk and threaten the new forest which will emerge in this area.

The Waugh Gulch Demonstration Area was also salvage harvested following the fires of 2000. This area burned at a high intensity. This is another example of how fuel reduction treatments proposed in the Burned Area Recovery FEIS will appear on the ground.



PAST FIRE SALVAGE HARVESTING

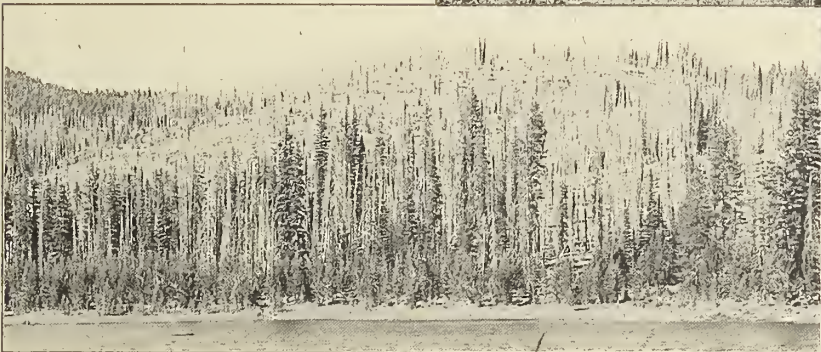
Many large fires have occurred on the Bitterroot National Forest over the years and have been treated through salvage harvesting. In order to minimize the impacts from the activity involved in the harvesting of timber, timber sale purchasers were allowed to operate only when the ground was either frozen or snow covered. To avoid creating roads that would further impact sensitive soils, or add to a road system that was already lacking in its funding for adequate maintenance, timber sale contracts specified the use of helicopters for yarding or transporting the trees to landing sites where they could be accessed by an existing road system.

The pictures shown on this page are of previous areas on the forest that were burned and later partially harvested. This will give you some idea of what areas burned during the fires of 2000 would look like if proposed fuel reduction treatments are implemented in the future.

Right: This is a close-up view of the harvested area on Ward Mountain taken in August of this year.



Above: The Ward Mountain Fire of 1994 as it looks like today from Highway 93. Burned trees were harvested in 1995 and 1996 in the lower portion of the burn using helicopter yarding. (Photo taken early this year).



Above: Salvage area on the 1994 Ann Fire. Harvesting took place on the lower part of the fire from the shore of the lake to the mid-portion of the fire. Harvesting took place during the winter over snow or frozen ground.

Right: The 1961 Sleeping Child fire was mostly salvage harvested. However, some areas in that burn were not harvested. Climate conditions in this part of Montana are typically dry, which prevents organic materials to decompose in a short period of time. Over the years, the fire-killed trees have fallen providing plenty of fuel for a high intensity fire.



Above: This is part of the logged area of the 1961 Sleeping Child Fire as it looks now.

ROAD REHABILITATION... WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?



Above: This road was decommissioned in 1996. It is located in the Ambrose area on the Stevensville Ranger District.

The Burned Area Recovery Final Environmental Impact Statement proposes to remove culverts, decompact, revegetate, and recontour some roads that are no longer needed. The photos here show previous roads that were decommissioned and rehabilitated in the past.

Right: This road was decommissioned and rehabilitated on the West Fork Ranger District in 1993.



Corrections from Issue 4:

The Acronym NEPA is National Environmental Policy Act (not National Protection Act).

Bitterroot RC&D is Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development (not Rural Community and Development).



On the cover:

Area shown is between Blodgett and Mill Creek Drainages.

SHARED VIEWS

News and Information for the Communities of the Bitterroot National Forest

For further information about rural community and development programs call

Bitter Root RC&D at

363-1444, extension 5.

To get involved with BIRT volunteer projects contact

Becki Linderman at the

BIRT office at 375-1234.

For general information

about S&PF programs

contact Nan Christianson at

363-7113.

SULA PEAK LOOKOUT... READY FOR FIRE SEASON 2002



The unique octagonal shape of the new lookout provides a maximum view. This new prototype posed some difficult construction problems, but it didn't prevent carpenters Mark Brushia and Jeff Diepstraten from doing an outstanding job. The lookout was completed on September 21st.

A special dedication is planned for next spring.



Bitterroot National Forest

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STATE & PRIVATE FORESTRY INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVE

Last July proved to be a difficult time to area residents living in or near the burned areas in the southwestern part of the Bitterroot Valley. Heavy rains produced mudslides that caused substantial damage to the infrastructure of private landowners such as homes, access roads, culverts, wells, and other structures.

According to State and Private Forestry (S&PF) staff officer Nan Christianson, "The Bitterroot National Forest recognized the impact the mudslides had on folks. It's not traditionally a responsibility of the Forest

Service to address these issues but the fire season of 2000 created circumstances that 'changed the rules,'" said Christianson. "The commitment we feel to our community and neighbors is so strong, we really struggled with how to be of assistance to our private landowners." Through a very unique infrastructure initiative provided for by the National Fire Plan, the Forest was able to secure \$123,000 to help private landowners repair infrastructure damage caused by the mudslides.

Like all S&PF programs, the actual ability to deliver the money and get the work done is shared with active groups in our community. In this instance, the Bitterroot Interagency/Community Recovery

Team (BIRT) and the Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) are the keys in getting money to the ground and work accomplished in the areas of greatest need.

By the August 30th deadline, 50 applications were submitted to the Bitter Root RC&D. According to BIRT program manager Cathy Johnson some of the applicants qualify for similar funding through other local agency programs. "Before any money is dispersed," Johnson said, "the RC&D is assessing each application to match the needs to the available programs that will provide the maximum benefit in an effort to spread the money further."

